

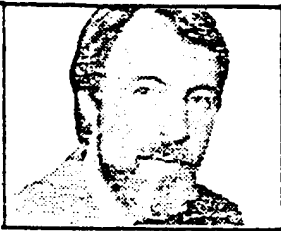
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# Pat: not relaxing, not enjoying it

**W**ASHINGTON — Talking to Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan these days is like interviewing the victim of a mugging. He is hurt, puzzled, angry, wondering whether he didn't somehow invite the crime. And all his friends are saying, "Dummy, you shouldn't have walked into Central Park."

Moynihan's mistake was in trying to support what he thought would be a responsible, bipartisan, Reagan administration policy in Central America. To stop Nicaraguan aid to leftist rebels in El Salvador, Moynihan, the Democratic vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, was willing to go along with Reagan and harass the Nicaraguans with a covert guerrilla war—strictly, he thought, within the limits of the law.



Lars-Erik  
Nelson

"A covert assistance policy based upon reciprocating the Sandinistas' export of revolution is arguably a justifiable, proportional response to the government of Nicaragua's breaches of law," Moynihan said on the Senate floor last November. When President Reagan suggested in an interview that the U.S. was in fact trying to topple the Marxist Sandinista regime, Moynihan moved swiftly to save the President from his own "misstatement."

"What must be stated today is that the President has misstated his own policy," Moynihan told the Senate on March 29. Reagan's real aim in Nicaragua, he said, was limited to halting Nicaraguan support for the Salvadoran guerrillas.

On April 4, Reagan "misstated" his policy toward Nicaragua again. In a letter to Senate supporters, he said he would stop harassing Nicaragua as soon as it promised to restore democracy, reduce the size of its armed forces, stop aiding the Salvadoran rebels and cease its cozy relationship with the Soviet Union.

"Stop, stop," said Moynihan. "That is not what we agreed. All we are trying to do is stop Nicaragua's aid to the Salvadoran rebels." Three hours later, Reagan obligingly sent up another letter, this time agreeing with

Moynihan's limited description of the U.S. aims.

Thus reassured, Moynihan voted the next day to spend another \$21 million on aid to the "contra" guerrillas, who make no secret that their aim—regardless of Moynihan's—is to topple the Sandinistas. Only after he had cast this vote, did Moynihan realize that he had been betrayed: the CIA had been using the funds to mine three Nicaraguan harbors.

Horried, Moynihan resigned as vice chairman of the Intelligence Committee, claiming that he had been deceived. There were hoots of laughter. Surely, even if he had not known about the mining, he knew that the CIA was paying cutthroats to raid Nicaraguan farm cooperatives.

In fact, the \$62 million the U.S. has spent on its "secret" war against Nicaragua since 1982 has bought the highly publicized deaths of 317 Sandinista soldiers and 346 civilians and \$100 million in economic damage, including the destruction of oil tanks, factories, bridges, communications networks and electrical systems.

Moynihan says he was vaguely aware that "we have blood on our hands." But "it just didn't sink in" that the CIA was so intimately involved. He was more impressed by the high quality of the CIA operatives he met—"really superb people, willing to try anything."

**M**OYNIHAN talked himself into a lofty role of leading the bipartisan support for U.S. security interests. He was eager to restore the morale and effectiveness of the CIA after its years in the wilderness. He was lulled into defending the Reagan administration's dirty little war against Nicaragua.

And he has nothing to show for it. The CIA is once again on the brink of failure and disgrace. The Salvadoran rebellion is not being defeated. The Sandinistas are as strong as ever. The United States is no safer.

But maybe it is wiser. Moynihan sits up at his farm in Pindar's Corners, N.Y., musing that maybe Reagan has outsmarted himself. The money to finance his "contras" runs out on May 13. The House of Representatives will not approve any more, no matter what stories the administration tells. And there will be no more Pat Moynihans, patriotic and bipartisan, to front for Reagan. The Democrats realize, as Moynihan says, "After you've been fooled by him once or twice, pretty soon it's no longer his fault."